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ABSTRACT

Like Janus of Roman mythology--who had influence over the way things began and ended and who was always represented as facing in both directions--today's community college president faces two opposite poles. On one hand, s/he luxuriates in the memory of the 1960's, when new community colleges were opened almost every week and the college president functioned as an educational entrepreneur. On the other hand, s/he faces an uncertain future plagued with financial difficulties which force him/her to act as a manager of limited resources, caught in the middle of public pressure groups, governance issues, and collective bargaining disputes. The acceptance of this new role is made difficult by the disappearance of numerous advantages enjoyed by college presidents in the 1960's. College autonomy is especially threatened by the state's increased role in the control and coordination of higher education, and the president has had to share his/her authority with legislatures and statutory boards who are removed from the subtleties and complexities of local situations. Indications are that the conditions will worsen for community colleges and their presidents, making the challenges for creativity greater than ever before. (JP)

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT:
A CONTEMPORARY JANUS

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The Community College President:

A Contemporary Janus

If a citizen of ancient Rome were about to embark on some bold new venture, he very likely would first pay his respects to the Roman God Janus, who, it was believed, had influence over the way things began and ended. Gayley (1911, p. 60) wrote that:

> He (Janus) is not only the god of doors, or material openings, but more truly of beginnings,--especially of good beginnings which insure good endings. Hence undoubtedly he is represented as facing both ways; for Romans very properly believed that beginning and ending were of the same piece, and that an undertaking ill begun could not achieve success (1911, p.60).

The symbolism of the faces of Janus may have a parallel association to the community college president of today. One face is turned toward the past and its strong growth patterns as the president luxuriates in memories of the "good old days" when a community college opened somewhere almost every week and, as McClenny (1978) observes, the president functioned as an educational entrepreneur, and creativity, glamour, and excitement prevailed in most quarters (p. 30).

The other face looks towards the future, its challenges and uncertainities. The universe of higher education has ceased to explode, leaving faculty members and administrators pondering the future (Berg, 1978, p. 3). Surely the contemporary community college president would hope that the ancient Roman belief that a good beginning will assure a good future applies to the life of a community college today.

The functions of the community college president have been described by various writers. Richardson, Blocker, and Bender (1972), crediting the work of Herbert Simon identified the functions of the chief executive officer as:

> Raising money, balancing the budget, participating in the establishment of institutional goals, working with the faculty to create an environment that encourages learning, and recruiting, and maintaining a high quality of faculty (p. 127).

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1973) described the president's role in the following manner:

> Under the general direction of the board, the president holds the key administrative position. He must extend leadership in relation to faculty members and other staff, students, alumni, government agencies, and the public more generally (p. 36).

More recently the activites of the community college president were described in the April, 1978 issue of the Community and Junior Journal which was devoted entirely to the activities of the president and included an essay by Robert Bickford (1978) who saw the role of the president from a marketing perspective:

> The application of the "marketing orientation" to the management of exchanges between the college and its diverse publics, by definition, places the president in the role of key marketer for the institution (p. 15).

Howard Sims (1978) writing in this same issue, projected the college president into the next decade as the man-in-the-middle among forces competing for resources, public pressure groups, governance issues, and the collective bargaining process (p. 20).

While the literature may accurately portray the functions of many community college presidents; are those described activities adequate for the community college president, who must face the future?

History records that the figure of Janus appeared on the gates of many temples in ancient Roman civilization. During this period, tradition dictated that in times of war the gates were to be opened and conversely in times of peace the gates were to be closed. Students of the Roman Empire would be correct in observing that the temple gates were usually open.

The gates of Janus are now opened once again. For today, the community college president faces challenges that not only are shaking the foundation of the community college movement, but may determine its future survival.

The American community college presidency is in a state of transition. No longer can the president face the future with a confidence rooted in his view of the past, free from external or internal threats to his domain. The problems that the community college president faces today are different from those of the 1960's, a period that has been coined by observers as the "good old days" or "glory days" of the community college movement. Berg (1978) observes, today, under pressure, the president is called upon to make decisions and recommendations which are certain to result in disappointment for one or another of the constituencies to whom he

must respond (p. 3). Berg's observation is optimistic, in that only a few will be disappointed in the decisions the president must make in the future.

Greenfield (1978) expressed the opinion that the presidential art is not that of walking on water but of keeping one's head above the tide of red ink and rising faculty militancy (p. 34). A myriad of other problems face the community college president of the future. McClenny (1978) observes:

> In contrast to his lot in the "glory" years, a community college president who is presently in touch with reality has been confronted with concerns about accountability, steady state conditions, retrenchment, consumerism, competition, loss of autonomy, government regulations, collective bargaining, attacks on traditional accreditation, court decisions, energy conservation, affirmative action, higher education spending, and faculty pessimism (p. 26).

As the "good old days" pass, so pass numerous advantages. Mistakes in administration or management were obscured by growth in student enrollment and the development of campuses (McClenney, 1978, p. 30). The community college president of today cannot expect to cover misjudgements quite so conveniently. Now that the "boom" is over most community college presidents are no longer involved in heavy entrepreneurship and development. Rather they have evolved into managers of limited resources, who must analyze the levels and dimensions of power which they really have (Wygal, 1978, p. 6).

One such dimension of power that in recent years has been eroded is the amount of local control a community college district has over its own destiny. This loss of power has primarily come through the expanded role which state government has elected to assume

in higher education. A survey of significant legislative action conducted in 1976 by Martorana (1978) revealed that there is a strong and growing attention of state legislatures to this level of education (p. 34).

Martorana's survey identified six areas that the respondents considered to be the most crucial in attracting legislative interest, attention, and action in 1976: (1) finance, (2) governance, (3) institutional growth, (4) legislative support, (5) personnel, and (6) no significant action (Martorana, 1978, p. 35).

Additional literature supports the arguments that local control may be becoming obsolete. Ronald Campbell (1978), the President of Monroe Community College in Monroe, Michigan states:

> Local control has been a hallmark of community colleges, and an enduring source of strength in their conception and growth. During the past twenty-five years, I have always accepted this maxim of the community college movement. However, events of the past decade in Michigan have led me to question whether community colleges really exercise any meaningful degree of local control (p. 48).

Supporting Campbell's observation, Stalcup (1978) concluded that the last vestages of local control are perilously close to extinction (p. 33).

Without a question the loss of local autonomy through expanded statewide coordination has affected the role of the community college president. Wygal (1978) believes the interest in "shared authority" and stronger governance procedures increasingly affect the role of the presidency, as do external controlling and coordinating operations (p. 6).

The issue is not new, during the mid 60's, Christopher Jencks came across university presidents who feared that statutory boards would be too far removed from the subtleties and complexities of local situations to treat each institution with respect for its unique tradition, problems and clientele (Berdahl, 1971, p. 31). William Craig (1978), chancellor of the California community system echoed the sentiments of a decade ago.

> Centralization and the additional bureaucracy of state control would stifle a lot of our functions. These are people's colleges. They have to be flexible to respond to community needs and try new ideas (Watkins, 1978, p. 1).

The future is not bright and the evidence seems to suggest that conditions shall worsen for the community college president. There appears to be a "Gloomy Gus" syndrome at work, as presidents commiserate with each other over the loss of power and status, the fickleness of boards of trustees and the vindictive enmity of former colleagues on the faculty (Greenfield, 1978, p. 34).

Centuries ago Roman Legions would march through the gates of the temple of Janus, to assure a good beginning and a good ending as they went to war. Today, community college presidents travel a road

marked by conflict and the temple gates are open. The battles that face the community college president must be fought on numerous fronts, sometimes against unseen opponents. The challenge for creativity has never been greater and attrition in the presidential ranks may become serious.

Hopefully the power of the good beginnings which the community junior colleges have enjoyed will sustain them through difficult times to bright futures. At the very least we should strive for a period when the gates of the Janus Temple can be closed.

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